



U.S. AIR FORCE

This Week in USAF and PACAF History **17-23 January 2011**



18 January 1778 **Captain James Cook sighted the Hawaiian Islands for the first time.** He named them the Sandwich Islands after his friend and patron, the Earl of Sandwich.



21 Jan 1911 Lt Paul W. Beck sent the **first radio message from a plane to a ground station** at Selfridge Field, Mich., 1.5 miles away. He designed a transmitter to send telegraph signals and used Phillip O. Parmalee's Wright plane (pictured left) flying at 100 feet for this demonstration.

17 January 1932 After a severe snowstorm, seven aircraft from the 11th Bombardment Squadron (BMS), March Field, California, flew missions for four days to **deliver supplies to snow-bound Navajo and Hopi Indians** near Winslow, Arizona. Lt Charles H. Howard received the MacKay Trophy for this effort. During WWII, the 11 BMS was stationed in a dozen locations throughout the Pacific.

20 January 1949 **The first flight of the Matador**, model XSSM-A-1, occurred at the White Sands Missile Range. The B-61 Matador was a turbojet-powered cruise missile which became **the Air Force's first fully operational tactical missile.**

22 January 1950 The U.S. Air Force established the **Air Research and Development Command.** In 1961, the organization was re-designated **Air Force Systems Command.**



USAF RB-69A

20 January 1960 Early in January 1960, the Soviet Union announced planned testing of more powerful rockets. The first test flights would impact within a 44,800-sq. mi. area in the Pacific, located only 1,000 miles southwest of the Hawaiian Islands. PACAF and PACFLT (Pacific Fleet) cooperated under **PROJECT BIG ARM** to observe these Soviet missile tests. On 20 and 22 January, PACAF employed KC-135, C-130, and RB-69 (P2V-7) aircraft to accomplish very successful observation and data-gathering missions.

21 January 1961 The Hawaii Air National Guard's 199th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron flew their new TF-102As for the first time. By May, the new aircraft would replace their old F-86s on alert status.



Hawaii Air National Guard F-102 aircraft



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23 January 1966 Military Airlift Command completed **Operation BLUE LIGHT**, the airlift of the Army's 3rd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, from Hickam AFB to Pleiku, South Vietnam, to offset the buildup of Communist forces there. The airlift began on Dec. 23, 1965, and its 231 C-141 sorties move approximately 3,000 troops and 4,700 tons of equipment. At the time, BLUE LIGHT counted as the largest combat zone airlift in history.

19 January 1968 **Major William J. Knight** received his senior pilot astronaut wings and the **Distinguished Flying Cross** for his 50-mile high flight in the X-15. A few months earlier, on 3 Oct 1967, Major Knight had piloted an X-15A-2 to a world speed record of 4,354 MPH.

21 January 1968 Communist forces began an extended siege of three Marine battalions at Khe Sanh, Vietnam. The **Siege of Khe Sanh** prompted an extensive airlift. USAF tactical transports made 447 landings and 576 airdrops under very hostile conditions. The airlift reinforced Khe Sanh with another battalion and delivered 12,430 tons of cargo, giving the defenders a 30-day supply of food, fuel, and ammunition. Enemy fire destroyed 3 C-123s and damaged at least 18 C-130s and 8 C-123s. The Marines later abandoned Khe Sanh on 23 June.



22 January-31 March 1968 USAF, USN, and USMC aircraft flew 24,016 sorties (21,449 tactical and 2,567 strategic) to support of the Khe Sanh outpost as part of **Operation NIAGARA**—an operation named for the flow of munitions expected to be delivered on the enemy.

23 January 1968 The Navy ship **USS Pueblo (AGER-2)**, was boarded by North Korean forces and seized in international waters off the coast of Wonsan, North Korea. Following this incident and increased enemy activity in Vietnam, the U.S. called ANG and AFRES units to active duty. The USS Pueblo crew was held captive for 11 months. The ship has never been returned.

20 January 1972 The last of Hickam's **C-47 Skytrains** (#404), also known as "Gooney Birds," departed for Taiwan after a 14-1/2 year stay at Hickam AFB. Upon arrival at Taiwan, the aircraft was to be modified, overhauled, and turned over to the Government of Indonesia as part of the Military Assistance Program.



C-47 at Hickam AFB in 1960s

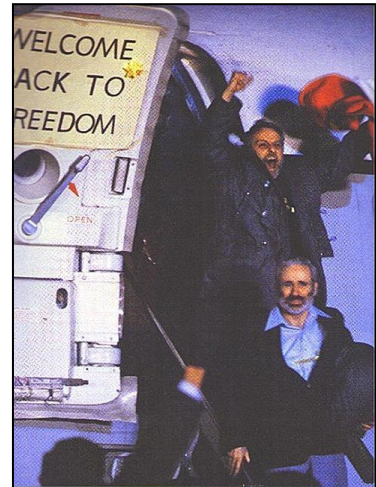


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18 January 1981 **Iran released 52 American hostages** held in the American Embassy in Tehran after 444 days. They were flown on an Air Algérie 727 to Algeria, where two C-9As took them to Germany for medical observation. On 25 January a VC-137, named "Freedom One," returned the hostages to the U.S. Out of gratitude for U.S. aid following earthquakes in October 1980, Algeria provided vital diplomatic assistance in negotiating the hostage release.



19 January 1985 **TYPHOON ERIC.** Through 21 January, two C-5 Galaxies and one C-141 from the 75th Military Airlift Squadron and 312th Military Airlift Squadron moved 186 tons of relief supplies, including 2,400 tents, tarpaulins, plastic sheeting, and water trailers to Viti Levu Island to help over 3,000 homeless victims.

21 January 1991 For his actions on this date during Desert Storm, Captain Paul T. "PJ" Johnson was **awarded the Air Force Cross**. An excerpt from the citation: "Captain Johnson was the flight lead on Sandy 57, a two-ship of A-10s tasked for search and rescue alert at a forward operating location. While en route, he received tasking to look for an F-14 crew that had been shot down the night before. During the next six hours he would lead his flight



The A-10 flown by Johnson on the rescue mission is on static display at the National Museum of the Air Force. (USAF Photo)

through three aerial refuelings, one attack on a possible SCUD missile site, and three hours of intensive searching deeper inside enemy territory than any A-10 had ever been. He risked his life as he had to fly at a mere 500 feet in order to pinpoint the survivor's location. When an enemy truck appeared to be heading toward his survivor, Captain Johnson directed his flight to destroy it, thus securing the rescue." Today, Brigadier General Johnson commands the 451st Air Expeditionary Wing, Kandahar Airfield, Afghanistan. For additional info see: [AIR FORCE Magazine, Dec 2010, Hog Heaven, pg 34-38](#)



22 January 1991 **DESERT STORM** "Smart bomb" attacks began against hardened aircraft shelters at Al Asad Air Base, Iraq. The attacks were so successful that Iraqi fighters started flying to Iran to escape destruction.